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'the grove,' *Fresno* 'the alder,' *Alcatraz* 'the pelican,' *Lobos* 'the wolves,' and in a thousand other words, we have evidences of a Spanish nomenclature without a Spanish civilization. Likewise *Puebla* reminds of the village common, and *alcalde* of the chief officer of the town. We need not omit from this medley of words "Monte del Diablo," and the legend of the appearance of the wearer of the cloven hoof, with the tradition of strange sights accompanied by the noise of clanking chains.

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THE FRENCH TENSES.

Grammaire de la langue française d'après de nouveaux principes concernant les temps des verbes et leur emploi par le docteur I.-M. RABBINOWICZ. 2^me édition. Paris: Bouillon. 1889. Svo, pp. xxxi, 207.

Tout est dit et l'on vient trop tard après deux cents ans qu'il y a des hommes et qui . . . écrivent des grammaires françaises. Such is the natural feeling on opening the 'Grammaire de la langue française d'après de nouveaux principes concernant les temps des verbes et leur emploi,' by Dr. RABBINOWICZ. But a careful perusal of the work has convinced me that it is truly entitled to the claim set forth,—that the element of novelty is indeed present (albeit there is some difficulty in detecting the principles), and that if the author has embodied in his other works—ranging as they do from Grammars of the French, Latin, and Hebrew tongues to Scripture History, *via* treatises on English pronunciation, on the civil and criminal legislation of the Talmud, and on "Les Poisons de Mainonide"—as much observation and acumen as in his "Grammaire française," he is indeed a conspicuous illustration of the great powers and versatility of the race to which he belongs.

Dr. RABBINOWICZ, although claiming novelty only for his theory of the use of verbs, has included his treatment of this subject in a complete grammar. The wisdom of this course is hardly obvious, as on all but the verbs he has little to say that is not far more exhaustively treated by other grammarians, with here and there a clever way of putting a

rule (p. 130, 1st par.); here and there an innovation that is scarcely an improvement, such as the substitution of the terms *ante-verbal* and *post-verbal* for *conjunctif* and *disjunctif* (pp. 57-58); here and there a totally inadequate exposition, as in the case of the declension of the relative pronouns (pp. 60-61). But, with the exception of the Appendix (on the orthography of the nasal syllable *ã*, and on the orthographic doubling of consonants), which seems to me of small usefulness, it is by his treatment of the verbs that our author would be judged, and to that we will turn at once.

The first thing that meets the reader is a complete remodelling of the nomenclature of the French tenses, founded on uses of them that are not covered by the theory implied in their names. Because the tense called *plus-que-parfait*, for instance, is not unfrequently used without the past action to which it is prior being stated, Dr. RABBINOWICZ rejects this name. Again, he is at a loss to account for the fact that the tense named *passé défini* in French is called "past indefinite" in Italian, and he might have added in Greek.—Now it does not take a John Stuart Mill to be dissatisfied with names, since their connotation is ever changing: but it is well to make sure that you realize what can be said in their defence before you throw them out, otherwise it might be argued that a fuller understanding would have won them more regard. The names that obtain in French grammars for the tenses of verbs are unsatisfactory, mainly because they are too special to the French language and do not point clearly enough to the correspondence of the French tenses with the tenses of other languages—a thoroughly characteristic French defect; but that they have a very definite and clear meaning must be understood by whoever wishes to reform them, if he would not weaken his entire argument. Thus, Dr. RABBINOWICZ would have improved his position, if he had shown that he fully realized the force of the present nomenclature, and yet was equal to the suggestion of a better: if, for instance, he had given a more substantial reason for his dissatisfaction than the following (p. 4, note):

Les grammairiens français donnent au présent-parfait le nom de passé indéfini. Les

motifs de cette dénomination sont évidemment mauvais, puisque tous les grammairiens italiens donnent à cette forme le nom de passé défini. Je crois donc que les Italiens ont raison de rejeter la dénomination française: les Français ont raison de rejeter le nom italien, tandis que moi j'ai deux fois raison en rejetant l'un et l'autre.

This one touch of humor in the whole book seems singularly misplaced, as there was afforded by this anomaly a most useful opportunity of showing how the same thing may be differently viewed. That tense which is always made definite in point of time by an external indication, whether explicit or implicit, the Greeks and Italians call "past indefinite," since it has always to be accompanied by this external indication, and is consequently not definite by itself: the French view is that, as it is always so accompanied, it is always definitely used, and may be called "definite." In the same way, if a statesman has to be protected by a posse of private detectives wherever he goes, he may, according to the point of view, be called the safest, or the most unsafe, of men.

Is the nomenclature proposed by Dr. RABBINOWICZ such as to cover the ground more completely than that which it seeks to displace? His nomenclature hangs mainly on the use of the two names *narratif* (or tense 'that can only occur in narrative') for the past definite, and *figuratif* (or tense 'that can only be fixed by an artist,') for the imperfect. Now the former of these terms has to be very carefully explained (p. 2, note), before it can be made to exclude the imperfects. Why do these not belong in an equal degree to the narrative category? It is as much a part of my story if I say, "The sun shone brightly," as it is to say, "I sallied forth." The name *narratif* has no less to be defined than its predecessor, the name *historical tense* (given by many to the "past definite"), by saying that it is the tense that carries on the thread of the incidents of a story. And even so, we find the imperfect not unfrequently doing that duty (p. 79). Thus the name *narratif* is far from being wholly satisfactory.—As to *figuratif*, why could not a painter depict an action described by a past definite quite as well as an action described by

an imperfect?—*Jésus pria*: surely a HOLMAN HUNT could paint a sublime companion to his "Behold I stand at the door and knock," with no other epigraph than those two words. Is indeed the famous picture by Munkacsy, "Christ before Pilate," anything but a pictorial representation of Matt. xxvii, 11-14, where all the tenses are past definites?—Thus neither of the two new names by which our author proposes to replace the old ones is free from the same reproaches that he levels at the accepted nomenclature.

By this, however, I do not wish to be understood to imply that I undervalue this attempt to put the real force of the tenses in question in a clearer light. Very far from it. Whether or not this nomenclature be the best available (none can be perfect and adequate to all requirements), Dr. RABBINOWICZ has done extremely useful service by enforcing, in the strongest possible manner and with a most praiseworthy wealth of illustration, a point on which too much stress cannot possibly be laid. And for this the thanks of all students and teachers of French are due to him.

His point is that the past definite, or *narratif* as he calls it, "witnesses the beginning of the action expressed by the verb." [*Le narratif*] he writes, *indique un changement d'état ou le passage de l'état qui précéderait l'action à l'état nouveau indiqué par ce verbe, ou le passage de l'inaction à l'état d'activité, ou le passage d'une autre activité à celle indiquée par le verbe*. This is excellent, and so is part of the definition of the imperfect, or *figuratif*, which follows: *Le figuratif . . . n'indique pas le commencement*" (p. 77). There is nothing new about this statement: we have seen above that the old name "historical tense" meant just this; but there is much novelty in the extreme prominence that is given to it, in the elaborate deductions drawn from the principle implied, and in the profuse illustrations with which it is supported. Pages 77 to 107 are the most interesting reading I have encountered in French grammar. In these pages Dr. RABBINOWICZ draws from the definitions above given the following deductions. The *figuratif* is used:

1. To describe repetition, habits, disposition, inherent qualities, general state or condition.

2. To describe actions taken subjectively, i. e., *quand l'action est prise au point de vue du sujet de la proposition, tandis que le narratif s'emploie quand l'action est prise dans un sens objectif, c.-à-d. considérée en elle-même, abstraction faite des circonstances ou des dispositions d'esprit du sujet qui ont pu l'amener à agir ainsi* (p. 78).—The best illustration of this occurs under another head (foot of p. 105): *A cela près, il était et il fut en toute chose équitable, intelligent, etc.* (Under this head, too, is brought in, without much appropriateness, the use of the imperfect to introduce a philosophical idea, or a quoted epigram.)

3. To comment upon or give the causes of the action expressed by the *narratif*.

4. Between parentheses, or in parenthetical clauses.

5. Instead of a participle present.

6. To give the contents of a letter, etc.

7. In *oratio obliqua* after *verba sentiendi et declarandi*.

8. Alternately with past definites for the following purposes :

a. To contrast the subjective with the objective presentation.

b. To contrast opinions and feelings with actions.

c. To express priority of time.

d. [This paragraph refers irregularly to the difference between the pluperfect and the past anterior.]

e. To express a result more forcibly as a state.

f. To pause in a narrative, and describe the state reached.

g. To give the preamble or preliminaries to an action which the *narratif* completes.

h. To give relief to the *narratifs*, which become stronger in consequence.

With the exception of the last paragraph (pp. 105-107), there is nothing here but is as sound in theory as it is full in statement. The last paragraph, however, is, I submit, wholly inadequate, and leads me to the mention of what I consider a grave omission on the part of this grammar. Dr. RABBINOWICZ takes absolutely no notice of the force so universally attributed to the *past definite*, of marking the *completion* of the action described by the verb. Now, were it only on the ground of its wide

acceptance, this view deserved notice. But there is a further reason for its consideration—the reason that the Latin tense from which the *past definite* is derived most unquestionably possessed the function just indicated, and the French derivative could hardly help inheriting the same. “*Troja fuit*,” “*Dixit*,” etc., are typical examples of this use; in French, such passages at once suggest themselves as “*Esther*” II, 1 :

“ Je veux qu'on dise un jour aux siècles effrayés
Il fut des Juifs ; il fut une insolente race . . . ”

or : “ La poutre cédait, cédait ; enfin elle céda.”

But Dr. RABBINOWICZ seems to be at special pains to avoid any reference to the historical development of the language, and thereby throws away the only philosophical key to the problem of its growth. This is the defect alluded to at the beginning of these remarks. In vain may one search for the principles that warrant, for instance, our author's derivation of the tenses (p. 6). The subjunctive present he derives from the indicative present, and illustrates as follows : “ *Indicatif, nous avons, subjonctif, que nous ayions* ” (!). The present participle he derives from the imperfect indicative, or the converse—whichever you prefer—and appends this remarkable note : *Cela revient au même, si on fait abstraction du développement historique, et qu'on ne pense qu'à la manière dont les étrangers et les enfants qui n'ont pas encore entendu prononcer toutes les formes d'un verbe, font dériver une forme de l'autre*. The result is a most arbitrary scheme of derivation, involving, in the account of the uses of the *narratif*, the omission of that function which is more especially to be referred to its Latin prototype.

As a matter of fact, the *past definite*, in the immense majority of cases where it occurs, is used in French—like the Latin perfect, like the Greek aorist (in one of its frequent functions), like the Italian *past indefinite* so-called—to introduce a *new* action, to witness its beginning : while the *imperfect* takes no cognizance of a beginning. This will at once solve most difficulties, and especial by the following conundrums : —*Paul avait vingt ans à Pâques—Pierre eut vingt ans à Pâques*. Which is the younger ?

—Pierre, of course, since he reached that age then and not before.—*Le lendemain le mur eut trente pieds de haut.* What is the context implied?—That the wall is building, since it reached that height on that day. *À six heures du matin je sonnai* (or *sonnais*) *à sa porte.* I am earlier if I use the *imperfect*, since at 6 A. M. I am no longer beginning to ring the bell.

But then, most actions are not spread out over an extended period of time, and it follows that their inception and their conclusion are mostly spoken of in one breath: to do a thing, is to have that thing "done." This use of the participle "done" is very instructive. It shows how the inceptive idea can merge into the completing idea. This twofold connotation is in reality that of the *passé défini*. The mistake hitherto made has been either to underrate or to ignore the inceptive force; the mistake, I submit, that Dr. RABBINOWICZ is here making, is that of ignoring the completing force.

So true is this, that the *past definite* is used in French—in spite of what is so frequently stated by grammarians (and indeed by Dr. RABBINOWICZ himself, p. 77 et passim), viz., that the *imperfect* is exclusively the tense that expresses "duration"—whenever the action is viewed from such a standpoint as admits of its being *considered in its entirety, from beginning to end, as one action*; the "duration" has nothing to do with the matter, and may be of exceeding length. For instance: *Pendant cinquante jours la peste sévit.*—*Louis XIV régna plus de soixante ans.*—*Le Moyen-Age dura près de dix siècles.* In each of these, cases, and in all similar ones, it is the idea of one action lasting continuously from its inception to its conclusion that the *past definite* expresses; and to this explanation I would refer the examples given by Dr. RABBINOWICZ in the first paragraph of his division "*h*" (pp. 105–106). *Napoléon était un grand général* differs from *Napoléon fut un grand général*, inasmuch as the latter views, or better reviews, his whole career as one continuous period of action, while the former does not, but refers us back to a point of time contemporary with Napoleon himself, whence of course his career could not be viewed to its end. In such a case, Dr. RABBINOWICZ merely says that the

past definite "donne plus d'énergie à l'action."

To sum up the uses of these two tenses:

1. The *past definite* introduces a new action in the past; the *imperfect* states the action as being in progress.

2. The *past definite* expresses any past action, however long in duration, that is continuous during a stated or implied period of time; the *imperfect* is required whenever the action is a repeated one, instead of being continuous.

It would be interesting to follow Dr. RABBINOWICZ through his theories of the *past anterior*, which he would call *past posterior* because there is generally some action mentioned before it, and of the subjunctive, in which he ignores the subjective force, ascribing to it purely a connotation of vagueness or doubt (although there is not much doubt about the action in such cases as *Je regrette que vous ayez échoué*, and *Il faut qu'il meure*). Perusal of these chapters (37–41) will well repay the reader: they will make him furbish up his ideas, even if they do not compel him to alter them.

In conclusion, this little grammar may be heartily recommended to all who are concerned with French syntax. The language is remarkably good French for an author who has also published in the German tongue, although there are occasional turns that betray the foreigner; e. g., p. 47, l. 24; p. 51, l. 11 et passim (abuse of *avant* for *devant*); p. 73, ll. 6, 7; p. 75, l. 15; p. 106, l. 10; p. 121, l. 15; p. 65, l. 3; p. 173, l. 15. It is only to be regretted that so careful a work, especially a second edition, should be marred by misprints, of which an undue number are to be found.

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GERMAN LITERATURE.

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